

KNOW YOUR STUDENT

FACT SHEETS TO GUIDE THE
LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT
OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS



Spina Bifida

Definition

Spina Bifida is a congenital disability where one or more vertebrae do not completely close around the spinal cord. Damage to the nervous system may result in some degree of paralysis and loss of feeling in the body below the damaged area and may also include lack of bladder and bowel control (incontinence). As well, hydrocephalus, an accumulation of spinal fluid in the brain may occur. This is managed by the insertion of a shunt draining the cerebral-spinal fluid from the brain.

For further information see the factsheet relating to **physical disability**.

Impact on training and assessment

Learners with Spina Bifida and hydrocephalus may have difficulties with:

- memory;
- attention;
- reasoning;
- impulsivity;
- sequencing;
- organisation;
- comprehension;
- hand-eye coordination;
- sitting for long periods of time, or in certain positions;
- using certain technology without appropriate modifications (e.g. keyboards that are shaped differently, or tilted screens to support altered mobility).

These difficulties are neurologically based and do not reflect poor motivation or a lack of interest in learning.

Delivery and assessment strategies

The following strategies are suggestions. Each student who is living with Spina Bifida will have their own individual support and learning needs and it's

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recommended as a first step, that you ask them and/or their family or support network (if such a network is present and accessible) what the best ways to support their learning is.

When liaising with anyone other than the student directly, ensure you maintain confidentiality, as per TAFE Queensland Privacy Policy.

Presenting and communicating information

- If the learner uses a wheelchair, reserve an easily accessible space in the training / tutorial room.
- Give plenty of notice when there is a change of venue / access.
- Present information in a range of formats – verbal, print, audio-visual, electronic.
- Break down information and tasks into small steps.
- Provide extra time where processes and sequences are important and where learners have mobility difficulties.
- Keep diagrams uncluttered and use colour to emphasis main points.
- Encourage the learner to submit an early draft of assignments and provide feedback as a formative process.

Utilising technology to maximize student engagement

- A reader/scribe can assist learners with reading and writing material.
- Learning materials and information can be converted into formats that are accessible for the learner e.g. audio files (such as MP3 format), Braille (a tactile reading and writing code, which is read using the fingers) or large print.
- Screen reading software such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS) reads electronic material aloud to the user. It provides audible access to electronic information, software applications and the internet.
- Electronic magnification devices are available in portable, transportable, desktop and laptop based forms. They magnify or scan print based materials and objects.
- Magnification software (e.g. Microsoft Magnifier, ZoomText) enlarges the whole computer screen including text and application buttons / navigation.
- Anti-glare screens and reducing the brightness or changing the contrast of computer screens can benefit.
- Audio recording of training delivery or note taking (a person or digital note taker such as the Neo Notetaker) to assist learners with handwriting difficulties and / or with mishearing and misquoting.

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- Connect (also referred to as Desire2Learn) has numerous options to increase accessibility to information provided within Connect. Options such as screen readers, keyboard-only navigation, colour contrast accessibility features and zooming options are all available within Connect. Educators can access information about these options at <https://connect.tafeqld.edu.au/shared/help/student/content/en/Accessibility.html>.
- A Disability Coach or Disability Support Worker can assist the learner with planning and organising. The benefit to requesting a Disability Coach/Support Worker is that they may be able to look holistically at the support and learning needs of the student and provide some helpful ideas regarding software, or education strategies to help increase the student's understanding, participation and engagement.

All of the delivery strategies may be of assistance for assessment

- Provide a separate room that is quiet and free from distraction, if required.
- Enable and encourage breaks if needed by the student and ensure that any software or modified computing equipment is available and able to be used for assessment purposes.
- Use short answer questions rather than multiple choice.

References

- Australian Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association, <http://www.asbha.org.au>

Further Resources

- Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training, <http://www.adcet.edu.au/>
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/spina_bifida/spina_bifida.htm